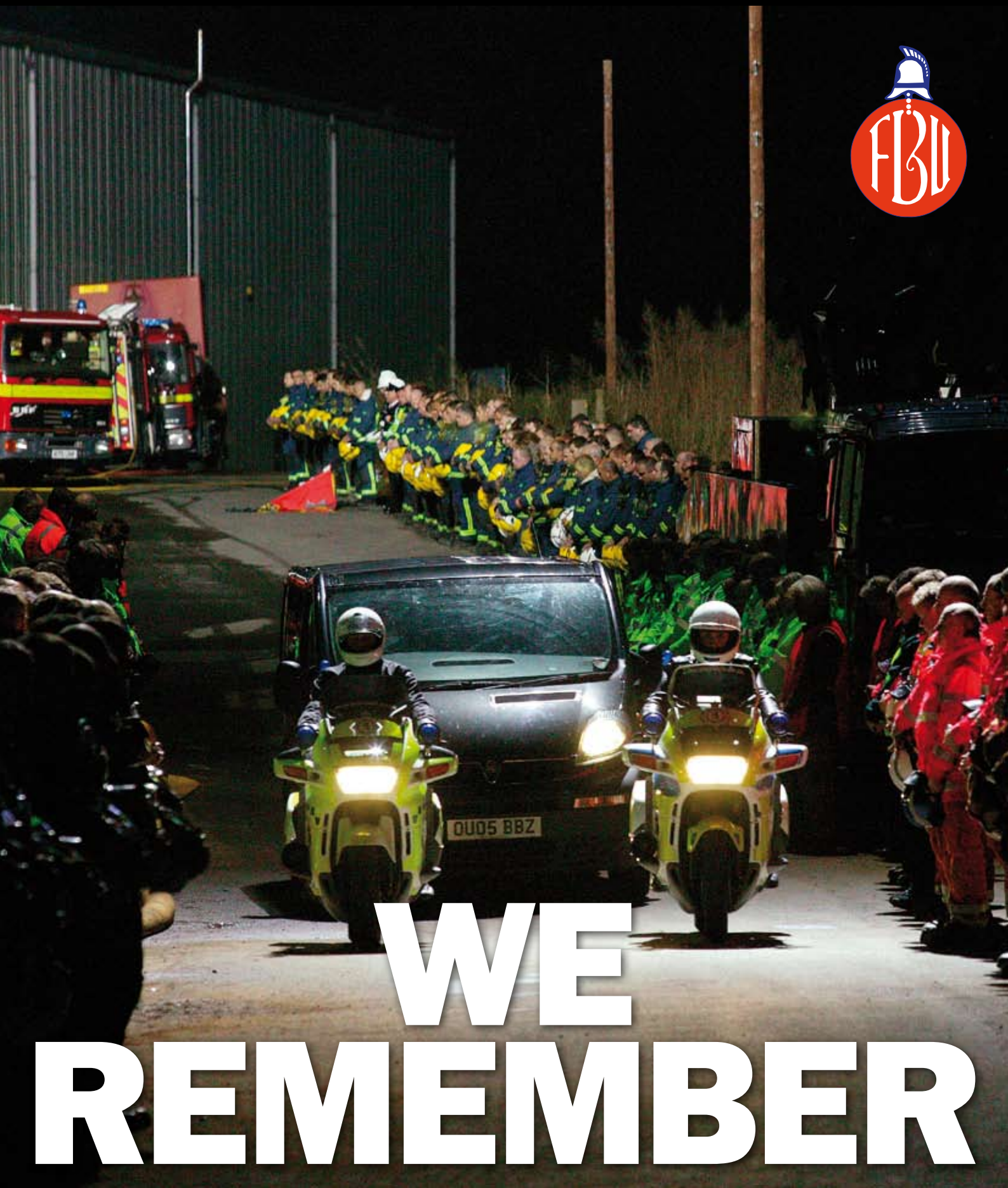


FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

November/December 2007



WE REMEMBER

Tragedy in Warwickshire



This issue of *Firefighter* has been delayed as a result of the recent tragedy in Warwickshire. Four of our members have been killed and I know that everyone will join me in paying tribute to Ian Reid, John Averis, Ashley Stephens and Darren Yates-Badley. Our thoughts are with their families and with their colleagues in Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. On behalf of the union, I visited the site of the fire as well as the Stratford upon Avon and Alcester fire stations from which Ian, John, Ashley and Darren worked. In laying a floral tribute at the two stations, I was able to see first hand the terrible impact of these deaths on the whole community but also the way that firefighters and the community had come together to support those involved.

Our first task in these circumstances is to look after the families of those who have been killed. There are a range of jobs which the FBU undertakes in these terrible circumstances. Nothing can stop the hurt or the grief but we can help to take away other pressures at this traumatic time. Our Accident and Injury Fund (AIF) is a way by which every single member who contributes provides financial assistance to the families involved. We have the most experienced team of fire service lawyers who will provide advice and assistance on a range of issues. And we have local and national officials who will do whatever is possible to provide

help, advice and assistance over the coming months.

We have also put in place various mechanisms to provide support and assistance to our Warwickshire members and to others who attended the incident. A large number of members are likely to face very difficult and painful interviews and we have already put in place support for this process. I pay tribute to our local and regional officials who have handled themselves with dignity

and professionalism at a time of tragedy. They have no other agenda than helping FBU members, nothing more and nothing less.

One service – one voice

This tragedy demonstrates more clearly than anything else that all firefighters need to be united in protecting our service and those working within it – regardless of the duty system they work. Wholetime or retained – we face the same risks and we need

to work together to learn the lessons of this tragedy in order to try to protect others facing similar risks in the future.

In the last few years we have lost firefighters who work wholetime and firefighters working the retained duty system. Fire does not discriminate between duty systems, and nor should anyone else. We don't and we won't. There are no such things as a retained fire service and a wholetime fire service. There is simply the fire and



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

rescue service and it remains united against those outside it and within it who would like to see it divided.

We have dealt with a number of tragedies in the past few years. Each one is different and each one affects a different group of families and firefighters. We also need to look at the bigger picture. The grim fact is that we have now seen seven deaths in the line of duty in just eleven months. There appears to be an upward trend in firefighter

fatalities. We need to examine the facts and identify any common issues which arise. That is why I have already put in place arrangements for an examination of the issues raised by the tragedies of the past few years.

Our investigation into the tragedy in Warwickshire has only just begun. It is also likely to be a long and difficult process. But we do know the issues which were identified following the tragedies at Bethnal Green and Harrow Court. We shall now begin the process of examining common themes between these incidents.

We cannot pre-judge the outcome of investigations in Warwickshire. What I can assure you is that we will leave no stone unturned. Our investigation into this incident will be thorough and professional. Tragically, we now have a team of officials across the UK who have first hand experience of dealing with such a level of investigation.

I can also assure you that we are determined to see this issue through. That will mean that a range of matters will need to be raised within the Fire and Rescue Service, with government and with the employers. We owe that to Ian, John, Ashley and Darren and to our other colleagues who have been killed in the course of duty.

Our thoughts are with the families of those who have died in this tragedy and in the other recent tragedies. We pay tribute to those who have died and we pledge to honour their memory by campaigning for the living. We shall remember them.

Matt Wrack



Matt Wrack lays a wreath on behalf of the FBU at Stratford fire station

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WIN

A Christmas hamper see p22



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JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

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Union demands urgent Government action on pensions as branches consider ballot

ILL-HEALTH PENSIONS

The Union has called for urgent action on a change in guidance for recent amendments to the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS) that has already seen three firefighters in London denied a job and pension. It has put the government on notice that if the situation is not quickly resolved it will be looking to ballot on industrial action.

FBU branches up and down the country have been discussing the issue and meetings so far have indicated support for a “model resolution” issued by the Executive Council (EC) which calls on the EC to “prevail upon the Ministers within CLG to ensure that the current advice is amended in line with that originally provided in 2004” and, failing this, to “initiate a political campaign aimed at highlighting this disgrace and an industrial campaign aimed at bringing such an amendment into being.”

The Union accuses the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, that was in charge of firefighters’ pensions until recently, of misleading parliament – and stakeholders including the FBU – on changes to the FPS regarding ill-health retirement and redeployment.

New guidance issued in September 2006 by the

Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) means that a pension will not be paid even if no such job exists. The new guidance affects all firefighters and the Union has had strong indications that anyone who has retired on grounds of ill-health in the last five to 10 years will

have their pension reviewed.

General Secretary Matt Wrack said in a letter to minister Parmjit Dhanda: “This matter could be resolved relatively easily by a revision of the CLG guidance and a return to the position which existed immediately following the change in 2004.”

The three London members’ pensions were cut off in August. Matt Wrack said: “The Union cannot accept that this is an appropriate way to treat former firefighters.”

As part of the campaign, the FBU has sent out guidance letters to current and retired members explaining the position. A letter has also been sent to the National Association for Retired Firefighters informing it of the situation and seeking its support. Brigade secretaries have received assistance from head office for advising members with pending pension appeals. The FBU plans a meeting on 22 November to discuss the industrial campaign.

→ For more information, visit www.fbu.org.uk

Members with individual queries should contact their local official in the first instance.

STEFANO CAGNONI



Axed: London firefighter Martin Marriot was left without a job or pension



A firefighter at Toll Bar school near Doncaster in July this year. It will not open again until next Easter

FBU probe pinpoints health, safety, welfare

FLOODING

The interim findings of an investigation by the FBU into preparedness and health, safety and welfare arrangements for FBU members responding to major flooding incidents has identified a number of common areas of concern. These are:

- insufficient/inappropriate personal protective equipment;
- insufficient welfare arrangements;
- lack of warning to members required to leave FRA area for prolonged periods;
- lack of training for water rescue and working in or around water;
- managers attending unaccompanied to "inspect" incidents; and
- a lack of suitable decontamination facilities.

These findings will be fed in to the final FBU report due by the end of the year and the government's "lessons learned" review led by Sir Michael Pitt, chair of the South West Strategic Health Authority.

Its terms of reference are: flood risk management, including the risk posed by surface water flooding, and the way in which public and private sector might adapt to future risks and the vulnerability of critical infrastructure.

The review will examine how to reduce the risk and impact of floods as well as the emergency response to the floods in June and July.

It will seek views from those involved in the floods, including affected residents, the emergency services, business and professional associations.

Discounted insurance for members

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

FBU members will be offered discounted home, motor and travel insurance in the new year through a partnership with UIA, a provider of general insurance products to the trade union movement.

The scheme will allow members to buy insurance by phone or via a website providing a 15% discount on both home and travel insurance. Further details will be communicated in the new year.

As an introductory offer, UIA is running a competition that will give members the chance to win a Fuji digital camera.



For your chance to win, please send your full name and address (including postcode), as well as telephone number and email address (if you are happy to be contacted in this way) along with your renewal dates for home and motor insurance to:

FBUI Competition, UIA (Insurance) Ltd, Freepost SG947, Kings Court, London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 2YF.

Closing date for receipt of entries is 4 January.

→ FBU is an introducer appointed representative of UIA (Insurance) Ltd and UIA (Insurance Services) Ltd, both of which are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority.

Sounding off!

ALLI BURROWS

Regional G&L Rep region 12

Avon G&L Conference

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality in the Fire Service – an absolute taboo? This was the title of a groundbreaking conference, held 9-10 October by Avon Fire and Rescue Service in Bristol, that for the first time brought fire and rescue services (FRS) together to discuss this important issue.

The aim was to increase understanding and appreciation of LGBT equality issues within the FRS, share good practice in employment and service delivery and allow LGBT employees to network. Interest was high. There were over 200 delegates and speakers from serving frontline firefighters and control staff to senior managers in the UK FRS, the police and even from the US fire service.

Avon's Chief Fire Officer, Kevin Pearson, after the conference was opened by councillor Terry Walker, chair of Avon Fire Authority, questioned whether Avon Fire and Rescue Service had moved on following the HMI Thematic Review of 1999, which stated: "The subject of sexuality is an absolute taboo to most members of the service. In this area there was no understanding of the issues, nor any preparedness to contemplate them. The fact that many of those we spoke to were unaware of any gay or lesbian

LGBT employees remain hidden in the workforce – leading to stress and fear of persecution

members among the workforce indicates the fear that exists in respect of declaring sexuality within the service."

Over two days there were workshops on employment rights for LGBT workers, tackling harassment, employers' responsibilities and developing workplace equality policies for transsexuals. Some pertinent questions were asked, for instance: civil partnerships have made same-sex relationships visible and acceptable in society – why not in the fire service?

LGBT employees remain hidden in the workforce – leading to stress, fear of persecution and becoming the victims of homophobic jokes, or the need to laugh along with homophobia in the canteen culture for fear of inadvertently outing themselves.

Staffordshire Police, the conference heard, have gone so far as to eliminate the "canteen culture", a typically "male/white" environment where expressions of views and values go unchallenged.

The issue can have tragic consequences – one in three young people confused about their sexuality commits suicide, Jona Olsson, an openly lesbian chief fire officer from the USA, told the conference. Yet one firefighter "out" in the workplace can support that young person to feel comfortable about their sexuality and recognise its acceptance in society. We *can* be role models and we *can* make a difference.

Government fails to match new responsibilities with investment

SPENDING REVIEW

The government failed to inject new money into the fire and rescue service in its latest three-year comprehensive spending review (CSR), despite the Union's calls for more investment to match "unprecedented challenges" amid "ever increasing statutory responsibilities, expectations and demands placed on it by natural and man-made emergencies".

The budget for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is to rise to £4 billion in three years time to help tackle climate change and protect the countryside, yet no specific funding was announced for the fire service.

The BBC, commenting on the CSR, said that a cut to central government funding to local authorities might affect fire and rescue authorities disproportionately as local authorities prioritise social services.

In its submission to the CSR, the FBU pointed out that the UK fire and rescue service "is facing unprecedented challenges while maintaining a first class service to the public. This is in the midst of ever-increasing statutory responsibilities, expectations and demands placed on it by natural and man-made emergencies."

"The work being undertaken by the fire and rescue service is expanding and this needs to be addressed in this round of the comprehensive spending review."

"The fire and rescue service is the key responder to a wide range of emergencies and the FBU feels it is critical for the public's high degree of confidence in the service to be maintained and built upon."

"While the number of some types of fires is dropping, the range of emergencies being attended is expanding and the scale of some of those emergencies is growing."



Climate change is already bringing more heathland fires

BARRY BATECH/PA PHOTOS

COMMUNICATIONS

FBU-TUBE – coming soon to a screen near you ...

FBU-TUBE TV has been launched on YouTube with short videos of the FBU members at the scene of the summer floods in the north of England, talking to General Secretary Matt Wrack. Also featured is a video of the march from Falmouth to Camborne stations that took place on 29 September as part of the FBU's campaign against cuts in Cornwall.

The Union plans to use FBU-TUBE TV to highlight local campaigns and issues.



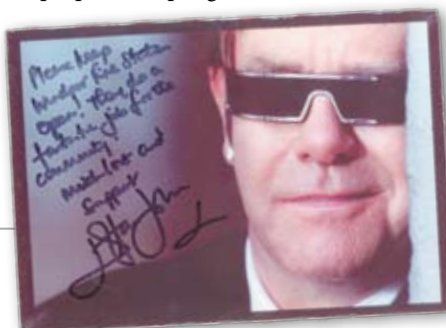
→ Visit www.fbu.org.uk and click on the link. Alternatively visit: www.youtube.com/fbutube

CUTS FIGHTBACK

Celebs join battle to save Windsor station

The campaign to save Windsor fire station gains support daily with Tony Benn and local resident Elton John (below) among the great and good rallying behind efforts to maintain 24-hour cover. Michael Rowley, FBU branch rep at Windsor, said it was "fantastic to have the support of Sir Elton and Tony Benn in our campaign to keep Windsor fire station at full strength. The proposals to downgrade Windsor during the critical night period will compromise the safety of residents and firefighters, not only in Windsor, but throughout east Berkshire."

Members are urged to post messages of support to the campaign website at www.windsorfirestation.co.uk and sign a 10 Downing street petition against the proposals at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/windsor-fire-stn>



◆ Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority rejected by 13-10 at a meeting in Exeter on Friday 26 October the budget-driven proposals to dual crew aerial appliances in Barnstable, Exeter, Plymouth and Torbay. The move, which followed a sustained FBU campaign against the plans involving the collection of over 11,500 signatures in a petition, means 32 firefighter posts - 8 at each station - have been safeguarded.

◆ Sean Starbuck, Executive Council member for Yorkshire and Humberside (FBU Region 4) has been elected as National Officer of the Union.

He secured 9,598 against 7,059 votes for Tam McFarlane, Executive Council member for the South West (FBU Region 13)



ANDREW WARD

◆ Trade unions in the South West have turned up the heat on two county councillors by backing FBU calls for their resignation. The FBU wants councillors David Whalley and Ken Yeo to quit after they failed to withdraw proposals to downgrade Camborne and Falmouth fire stations in the wake of the Penhallow Hotel fire. Speaking at the South West TUC's Regional Council on 6 October South West TUC Regional Secretary Nigel Costley said: "The truth is it wasn't just the firefighters who campaigned to keep the stations open - it was the public as well, including thousands of trade unionists from all walks of life."

◆ Lothian and Borders Fire Board has delayed a decision to reduce evening and weekend cover at Livingston under its integrated risk management plan. The proposal was to move from two full-time pumps to one full-time pump weekdays during the day and a retained pump evenings and weekends. These proposals have been strongly opposed by the FBU, which will now have the opportunity to present its alternative in detail to councillors.

Frontline
firefighters
should be the
priority, not
sniffer dogs



FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

It is now 16-odd months since firefighters in Hertfordshire returned to work after a bitter strike. As part of the return to work agreement signed by the FBU and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority, there was to be the establishment of a Community Fire Safety team.

To comprise 12 full time equivalent posts employed under Grey Book conditions, the team was an eminently sensible idea. It would promote among the people of Hertfordshire measures to prevent fires, as well as recruitment of RDS firefighters, and it was supported by all.

It was also a means by which – after much FBU pressure and as part of a series of measures including a relocation package – retained duty system (RDS) firefighters who were to lose their jobs with the closure of Radlett and Bovingdon fire stations, could have alternative employment.

The caveat was that the operation of the CFS team would not impact on the ability of Herts FRS to respond when the fires and other emergencies did happen. In order to ensure this, the fire authority was to recruit into the service sufficient numbers of firefighters so that establishment levels at wholetime stations stood at 12 for two-pump stations and 7 for one-pump stations, prior to the start-up of the CFS taskforce. The exception was Stevenage, which was to have an establishment of 13, following the successful creation of the task force. And that critical requirement was accepted and agreed by all parties.

So in October, it was with some surprise and anger that Herts firefighters discovered that chief fire officer Roy Wilsher had started up the task force but without the increase in wholetime establishment that had been agreed. To be sure, it was great news that up to six RDS firefighters are now working part-time on CFS activities. But it was extremely bad news that three wholetime firefighters have been removed from their emergency operational activities to be employed

HERTFORDSHIRE

Senior managers seem
more bothered about
their force of Labradors
than frontline
fire crews

full-time on the task force.

Making matters worse, this is happening at a time when there has been a sharp increase in the number of instances appliances have been taken “off the run” due to insufficient crewing levels.

Nobody is in any doubt that this is a breach of the return to work agreement and this has been made quite clear to senior managers.

But they seem more bothered about tackling their force of Labradors – a new addition to which

is proudly announced in a press release on HRFS’ website – than the frontline fire crews who are protecting the public day in and day out. Senior management refuse to reverse the decision and now county councillors are being brought into the fray.

This is a straight forward cut to frontline fire services. What is at stake is the safety of the Hertfordshire community as well as frontline operational firefighters who will have to respond to emergencies without the proper crew strength. The move also risks seriously undermining progress in rebuilding industrial relations that were so badly damaged during the bitter strike that ended in July 2006.

So just what did happen to the commitment to “developing a partnership approach and partnership agreement to facilitate staff and FBU involvement in shaping the service in the longer term” and “continued joint working with the FBU so that the service is well placed to balance the demands of community safety and operational response”. It is unfortunate that this other part of the back to work agreement appears to have been sidestepped too.

Hertfordshire county council now has a new councillor with responsibility for the fire service. It is to be hoped that he will appreciate the gravity of the situation – and ensure that priority is given to (safe) establishment levels of frontline firefighters, rather than sniffer dogs.

Who runs the Fire Service?

ANDY DARK, FBU ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY

Just who is running the fire service these days? It's a question more and more professionals in fire stations, control rooms and other workplaces in the Service are asking. Amid the control and command issues that emerged from the recent flooding crisis, this is clearly an issue that needs urgent attention.

In the past, technical and policy issues which affected the fire and rescue services nationally came under the overarching Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, the CFBAC, and its specialised national committees. This included the design and development of fire appliances, personal protective equipment, firefighter training, firefighter health and safety and general fire safety – both the community fire safety and fire safety enforcement roles. But that organisation, as many of you may know, has now been abolished, along with its sub committees.

Before World War II there were wide variations in the levels of training, provision of fire cover, nature, availability and types of fire appliances and equipment. There was also in many cases incompatibility of equipment – such as hydrant couplings – used by adjoining brigades that meant it could not be used in border areas.

In order to address these shortcomings the CFBAC was created in 1947 when the Government of the day returned fire services to local authority control from the wartime National Fire Service. Its purpose was to ensure policy consistency and technical standardisation across the country for the benefit of firefighters and the communities they served.

The CFBAC and its committees – chaired by ministers at the government department with responsibility for the fire and rescue services – took charge of tackling this. It was sometimes a slow process, but this was more to do with financial constraints and policies

of government and ministers than any bureaucracy within the CFBAC itself.

It was not perfect but it provided a central brain for the fire and rescue services in England that hitherto had been lacking. The outcomes of the work of the CFBAC ensured that the fire and rescue service was credited time and again with being efficient and effective. Most importantly of all, what emerged from the CFBAC had substance, legitimacy and gravitas.

Nevertheless the Labour government discarded the CFBAC. To fill the void by its abolition, the government created two fora. These are the Practitioners Forum (PF) – representing the fire and rescue services interests and chaired by the President of the Chief Fire Officers Associations (CFOA), currently Steve McGuirk – and the Business and Community Safety Forum (BCSF) – drawing its membership from a wide range of stakeholders beyond the fire and rescue services and chaired by Pamela Castle, formerly the leader of the CFBAC's Fire Safety Advisory Board.


More recently we have seen the formation of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisers Unit (CFRAU) headed by Sir Ken Knight. Though its creation was long-anticipated, the role of the unit is not clearly defined. It appears that this unit will to some degree replace the technical and policy advisory role to ministers and the fire and rescue service previously performed by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI).

The expectation is that appropriately competent staff to fill the as yet unknown various roles within CFRAU will be drawn on secondment from their fire and rescue services. Some might believe that CFRAU is simply the HMFSI by another name – but without the costs for central government.

More recently still, we have seen the somewhat nebulous Centre of Excellence

The wartime National Fire Service: the CFBAC was created in 1947 in a bid to ensure policy consistency and technical standardisation across the country, something that was lacking prior to the Second World War. It has been abolished. So what now?

PA Photos



for the Fire and Rescue Service (CoE), about which the department for Communities and Local Government is currently consulting.

What is unclear is how the CFRAU, PF, BCSF and the CoE will relate to each other.

If one of the roles of the CFRAU is to produce policy and guidance documents for ministers and the fire and rescue services in the way the CFBAC used to, will it use the PF and BCSF as sounding boards for its proposals and how will issues be raised? Is this not a duplication of the work planned for the CoE?

Will member organisations of the two fora (PF/ BCSF) who wish to raise an issue with the CFRAU be expected to raise it through their respective fora or can they circumvent that process and go straight to Sir Ken? Will the CFRAU provide the necessary fire and rescue service expertise to the British Standards Institution (BSI) committees as HMFSI did?

What will the role of the two fora be? How is the statutory role of the FBU on matters related to health and safety to be accommodated?

Events over the last few years, including Buncefield and the Penhallow hotel fire, as well as and the tragedies at Bethnal Green, Harrow Court and Marlie Farm, show that planning and policy based on professional firefighting expertise not ideological fancy must be given primacy. Investigations into Atherstone in Warwickshire may see this incident added to that list.

The FBU would welcome an early indication from within Communities and Local Government that it is capable of providing the long-overdue reassessment of the rush for change, witnessed in the immediate post-Bain period.

With major new challenges such as climate change and terrorist threats facing the Service, it is time for a return to joined up thinking. Drifting with the current – or a return to the pre-1939 situation – is unthinkable.

→ This is the first of series of articles *Firefighter* will publish on the future of the fire service



LIKE A BOMB

Fireworks will go off like a bomb unless urgent action is taken on their storage and transportation

The Union has called for the Government to take urgent action over the storage and transportation of fireworks to prevent a similar tragedy to the fatal explosion at Marlie Farm near Lewes in East Sussex nearly a year ago. At the height of the fireworks season – between July and January – thousands of tonnes of fireworks are transported across the UK and stored in the same ISO storage containers that were at the centre of the explosion on 3 December last year at Festival Fireworks which killed Brian Wembridge and Geoff Wicker and injured another nine firefighters, a police officer and two members of the public.

The Union has said that emergency services and the public are being put in needless danger because of confused regulation, lack of monitoring and the poor labelling of imported fireworks. And it has accused the Government and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) of being slow in their reaction to the dangers uncovered at other incidents during the Marlie Farm investigations.

The Union has also warned that four major fireworks incidents in the UK and similar incidents in six other countries found: The labelling on imported fireworks is unreliable; regulation is hampered by too many agencies being involved with little co-operation between them; serious concerns that ISO containers are inappropriate for the storage or transportation of fireworks; poor information and guidance for emergency services seriously hampered their ability to prepare and successfully execute their response.

LGA, CFOA join call for action

Following the FBU's lead, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) have called for "a root and branch review of the way fireworks are regulated in this country".

The two organisations are pressing for "greater controls and safeguards for the import, storage, distribution and sale of fireworks, with fresh attention to internet access and distribution". The £64m-a-year firework industry imports up to 20,000 tonnes of fire-

works annually, with the amount of fireworks circulating in an illegal market as high as 20% of this, they say.

In a statement on behalf of the LGA, Councillor Les Byrom said: "People continue to be blighted by the misuse of fireworks and it is not acceptable for an illegal trade to flourish at the expense of our citizens. There needs to be more effective control of what are essentially explosives and especially at this time of heightened risk. Some safeguards have been in place but the legislation needs to be revisited as it may no longer be sufficient."

Manufacturers' concerns

Concerns about current regulations come as the largest supplier of fireworks to the UK – Standard Fireworks – recently withdrew from the British Pyrotechnics Association (BPA), the fireworks industry association whose members must follow strict codes of practice on the sale of fireworks. In a letter circulated to chief fire officers Standard Fireworks wrote of its work to "continue to uphold safety and quality standards in the UK fireworks

Test with a 20' ISO container full of 60g rockets. Source: <http://www.chaf.info/>



industry” through lobbying of “trading standards officers, MPs and emergency services and others”. This work, it explained, could have been “jeopardised” by continued membership of the BPA since it had not accepted proposals that included agreeing “a mechanism for reporting potentially unsafe or illegal products found in the UK”.

UN: ‘something has to be done’

Adding to those demanding action is the United Nations, whose Committee on Dangerous Goods (Working Group on Explosives) concluded at a meeting in July 2007 that “something has to be done” in terms of applying restrictions in relation to the classification of fireworks. This came after the group, meeting to discuss, among other issues, the transportation of fireworks, heard from a UK expert who had “produced evidence from his experience that unexpected, violent

explosions can occur” even with fireworks with a classification of a lower Net Explosive Quantity (NEQ), a measure equal to around one quarter of the gross weight that is used to regulate fireworks.

Potential bombs

John McGhee, the FBU national officer responsible for health and safety who has been spearheading an ongoing FBU investigation into Marlie Farm and the lessons to be learned, said that under current regulations “Guy Fawkes could have simply applied for a licence to store the gunpowder he tried to blow up Parliament with.

“The quantity of explosives in ISO containers explodes with the same force as artillery shells or RAF bombs. Now we understand that Marlie Farm has re-opened and already the company has taken the supply of 38 tonnes of fireworks – six to seven times the amount of explosives

Guy Fawkes had planned to use.

“At present there is no effective regulation of fireworks standards, labelling, transportation or storage. Government and its agencies have done nothing to properly address what we have already learned about firework-linked explosions at incidents in the UK and other countries. A number of incidents involving fireworks stored in ISO containers have happened in the UK. An incident immediately prior to Marlie Farm resulted in a prosecution in West Yorkshire.

“Despite the evidence that fireworks stored in ISO containers present a significant risk of explosion when involved in fire, no guidance or instruction has been issued to emergency services. The last guidance on explosive incidents was issued to the emergency services in 1991. And this has been removed from the Department of Communities and Local Government’s fire and resilience website. It is a disgrace.”

“We need much better co-operation between Customs, HSE, trading standards, fire service and police to achieve an acceptable level of risk. Firefighters, other members of the emergency services and the public are being put needlessly at risk by this inaction. It is unacceptable and only underlines the need for an independent public inquiry into the explosion at Marlie Farm.”

Pressing Government

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack has written to Fire Minister Parmjit Dhandha expressing “extreme concern” about the possibility of a repeat of the kind of incident that occurred almost a year ago at Marlie Farm.

Pointing out that since December 2006, neither the Government, HSE nor any other regulatory agency has taken any action, the Union has called for the minister to review urgently the Manufacture and Storage of Explosives Regulations 2005 and the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations.



Fireworks for Chinese New Year Hong Kong China. China is a major importer of fireworks into the UK.

More: www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/healthsafety

Still a case to answer



The Union has called on the Fire Minister, Parmjit Dhanda MP, to answer a number of crucial questions on the regional controls project that have been thrown up by a further independent review of the latest FiReControl business case by the Institute of Public Finance

PAUL BOX

The FBU has once again commissioned the Institute of Public Finance (IPF) to undertake an objective and independent review of the latest business case for the FiReControl Project for regional control centres (RCCs). The report has been sent to ministers, interested parties within the fire service, the FBU parliamentary group of MPs and FBU members. The copy of the report to Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda was accompanied by a series of questions.

The IPF highlights one critical problem with FiReControl set out by the FBU five years ago: Actual and estimated costs continue to rise while estimated savings continue to fall. At that time the Union felt the central flaw in the project was that it would never pay for itself – contrary to repeated claims by ministers – but that the costs were being underestimated and the estimated savings exaggerated.

It must now be clear even to the Government that the project is being squeezed financially at both ends. A central concern of the Union is that the additional costs of the project will result in extreme pressure to cut frontline fire services to plug the gap. So, among the string of questions the FBU has asked the Government to answer, is a request for details of what contingency plans are in place to deal with this eventuality.

Shockingly, the IPF report found that project costs are up more than £50 million, or 6.5%, in nine months alone – to £857.5

million. Projected savings are down 575% from £115 million to £23 million. Meanwhile, the total invested by the department in the project is forecast to have risen from £160 million to £340 million, a rise of 112% or £180 million.

The IPF's report raises a range of other concerns, ranging from what appears to be confusion about how the risk is being managed in this high-risk project, and lack of detail on what exactly is in and "out of scope", to issues as critical as the staffing model for which there was a complete absence of detail.

In each and every area of concern raised by the IPF, the Union has put a specific question to the Minister to answer in detail.

Catherine Seurre, Crew Manager Control in Berkshire, said: "The IPF report once again demonstrates the business case for RCCs to be deeply flawed and really should be the final nail in the coffin of this unwanted and unnecessary project.

It must now be clear even to the Department that the project is being financially squeezed at both ends



An emergency fire control operator at work in Avon – a system that has never failed remains threatened with being torn apart with those who provide a brilliant public service thrown aside

KEY AREAS OF CONCERN

- Project costs leading to cuts in frontline fire services
- Timetable for regional controls going live
- Efficiency savings – and why they are going down
- Why has forecast Departmental spending on RRCs increased by 112.5% in 9 months.
- Will Firelink costs be in or 'out of scope'
- What "out of scope" activities will FRS still have to carry out and associated costs
- Justification of assumptions – and detail

"The existing arrangements for emergency fire controls are entirely fit for purpose. With a minimal investment in some areas of IT and communications, the existing arrangements could be further improved and genuine resilience be achieved.

"Instead of listening to the professionals, the Government is intent on pursuing this

unwanted and flawed project at great cost to the tax-payer."

Paul Watts, FBU rep for Catherine Seurre and other emergency fire control operators in the control rooms of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Oxfordshire said the "spiralling costs and uncertainties" around key areas of funding "should be sounding alarm bells throughout fire authorities across the country".

Fire authorities had a legal obligation to provide best value. "By allowing RCCs to happen they are failing the very people that they are empowered to protect. Now is the time for fire authority members to stand up and be accountable to their electorate and say 'No' to the Government on this flawed project."

Brenda Sturgess, an emergency fire control operator from Northants and an FBU control rep, said it was outrageous that, "after all this time, the Government still hasn't provided

any evidence to justify this extremely high-cost and high-risk project.

"More outrageous still to me, as a professional emergency fire control operator, the business case still has no details about how these regional control rooms will be staffed.

"The current system of brigade controls has never failed, but it remains threatened with being torn apart. My colleagues and I here in Northants and elsewhere in the country provide a top-rate public service. But this project will see us thrown aside. It beggars belief."

Said FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack: "The project as it stands and as it was originally drawn up will damage the service we provide and potentially endanger the public and frontline crews. Having gone through the floods of 2007 we are stronger in that view. We keenly await the minister's detailed answers to the crucial questions that have been put to him."

The FBU's membership among retained duty system (RDS) firefighters continues to grow as the organisation that claims it is the "first choice for firefighters on the retained duty system" is being deserted in droves in some parts of the country. Whole stations are quitting the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) and choosing the FBU as RDS firefighters realise which organisation represents their real interests and delivers on its promises.

The benefits of joining the FBU have become even clearer to many since the RFU refused to take up a seat on the newly constituted National Joint Council at its first meeting in September, a decision that has confirmed the FBU as the only organisation negotiating

on behalf of RDS firefighters at a national and local level.

Across the length and breadth of the UK, RDS firefighters are signing up to the Union.

Major inroads are being made in Yorkshire and Humberside with as many as 60 new RDS members – one North Yorkshire station is now 100% FBU, a development that followed a roadshow presentation by membership secretary Bryan Barrett. His visits to stations were only half way through as *Firefighter* went to press.

In Strathclyde, the FBU is recruiting large numbers of RDS firefighters and now some 70% are FBU, with fire stations in Oban and Campbeltown in Argyll and Bute now adding to those that are 100% FBU.

In Northern Ireland, RDS firefighters are

also deserting the RFU for the FBU. In October Enniskillen station went from being 50:50 to 100% FBU after a visit by regional FBU officials Tony Maguire and Stephen Boyd.

Tony Maguire said: "It would appear that many RFU members feel let down by the RFU's decision to refuse a seat on the NJC. This sense of disappointment has allowed FBU representatives an opportunity to meet RDS members face to face and spell out the benefits of FBU membership and the advantages of uniting all uniformed firefighters, regardless of duty system. Enniskillen is a first class example of RDS firefighters coming together through the FBU and strengthening our hand as the most effective representative body in the fire and rescue service."

Branch official Brian Armstrong said: "I

The professionals choose the FBU

RDS firefighters are joining the Union in ever greater numbers as the FBU – alone in negotiating on behalf of RDS firefighters at national and local level – secured the reinstatement of seven sacked members at a brigade's sole retained station



am very pleased that all RDS Firefighters in Enniskillen have joined the FBU and I am confident that we can now go forward as a united FBU branch."

Heartlands crumbling

Even in the RFU's heartland of Norfolk, some 50 odd RDS firefighters have ripped up their membership cards and are heading for the FBU.

At Attleborough, site of what the RFU describes as its head office and the fire station from where the current and former RFU leaders hail, there are now FBU members for the first time, with four RDS firefighters signing up to the Union in the past six months.

Said FBU Norfolk brigade chair, Pete Greeves: "The RFU don't hold branch

meetings that anybody has heard of, so how do they know what their members really want? And they can't negotiate anything on behalf of their members.

"RDS firefighters know that if they want a voice in a union that represents all firefighters in the service and if they want proper support when they are in times of need, there is only one organisation and that's the FBU."

"That's why we are signing up members almost every week, many of whom are deserting an organisation that time and again has failed to deliver to RDS firefighters."

Seven RDS reinstated

The benefits of FBU membership have been brought into sharp relief for seven firefighters from Sedgley, the sole retained station in the West Midlands, a brigade with 10 RDS firefighters out of total of more than 2,200. They were sacked on charges of gross misconduct but, following representation by the FBU in October, they have been reinstated.

The main and only charge against the RDS firefighters was that they were 'complicit' in operating a system for turnouts which the brigade alleged delayed the appliance turning out.

Local FBU officials first challenged the brigade's use of the word 'complicit' as none of the RDS firefighters were authors of the system and did not know anything different from the time of joining. Then they succeeded in showing that the system did not delay the appliance at all.

Senior managers had tried to close Sedgley fire station a number of years ago, but shelved plans after the FBU conducted a major public campaign. Had the decision to sack the firefighters been upheld then the fire station would have closed.

One who was reinstated was reduced in role and a further FBU member at Sedgley who remains dismissed will receive the full support of the FBU legal services.

The Sedgley fire crew were represented by Region 7 (West Midlands) regional officials Tony Nutting (who did the initial hearings) and Tony Larose, R7 Executive Council member Dave Whatton and West Midlands brigade membership secretary Chris Downes. Pete Preston and Harry Cotter from the National Retained Committee and Retained Executive Council member Tam Mitchell also helped with advice.

Representing all

Dave Whatton said that while Sedgley was the only retained fire station in the West Midlands its firefighters "are entitled to the same protection and same access to the resources of the Fire Brigades Union as firefighters in any other fire station in the brigade. As a Union we represent all uniformed staff in the UK fire service and we are committed to supporting and defending all firefighters regardless of duty system."

RF who?

The same cannot be said for any other organisation within the UK fire and rescue service. Tam Mitchell said: "As it haemorrhages members all over, questions are now being asked about just where the RFU's remaining membership is. And these questions have only got louder since the RFU's refusal in September to allow an independent audit of its membership, a step required to allow it to take up the offer of a seat on the National Joint Council."

The requirement for the RFU to have a seat on the NJC was that it only had to show that it had a membership of one fourteenth of the uniformed fire service – that's just 7.1%.

This extremely low threshold was granted – it was previously one twelfth – following heavy lobbying by the RFU and backing for it by employers. The employers also demanded that the RFU obtain a seat on the NJC prior to any count of membership being made.

Both demands were agreed by the FBU and at the first meeting of the newly constituted NJC on Friday 28 September, the RFU was invited to attend subject to agreement that it would submit its membership to a count by a reputable and independent body agreed by the NJC and that it would meet the costs. The RFU did not attend.

Subsequent claims that they can join the NJC at any time in the next three years are, at best, fanciful.

No seat waiting for RFU

Sean Starbuck, FBU National Officer responsible for RDS firefighters, said: "The RFU appears to be labouring under the illusion that that seat is still being kept vacant for it at the National Joint Council, a seat it had campaigned so hard for with employers and the Government.

"The fact is the new NJC constitution has been agreed – and it doesn't include anybody from the RFU on the employees' side. There isn't any empty seat waiting for them – not one. All 14 seats on the employees' side are now held by FBU representatives.

"The FBU remains the only organisation negotiating on behalf of firefighters working the retained duty system at a national and local level. The reality is that the RFU has been talking itself up – but it has no substance in membership terms.

"Red-faces must abound in Government and among senior civil servants. In a bid to attack the FBU they championed the RFU – and they ended up falling for their own spin."

→ RDS firefighters enjoy representation in the FBU through local branches and brigade committees, but also through the National Retained Committee, which is made up of serving RDS firefighters, and a dedicated retained rep, Tam Mitchell, on the Union's ruling Executive Council. More info: fbu.org.uk/aboutus/sections/retained/

Sedgley RDS firefighters training on their drill night

TIMM SONNENSCHEN/ROY PETERS PHOTOGRAPHY

WHAT DOES A UNION BARRISTER DO?

If you are in the fire service, Martin Seaward is the person you want to plead your case in court. Having represented the families of the bereaved in the Harrow Court and Bethnal Green fire inquests, he tells *Firefighter* how the inquest process should be changed to make it more effective and less distressing for all

If the backbone of support to firefighters or emergency fire control operators is FBU officials, the Union's legal service is a crucial complement. Working closely with Thompsons Solicitors with their enormous caseload on behalf of FBU members is Martin Seaward, a barrister who has no equal today at the "bar" in terms of his fire service experience.

His reputation is such that fire authorities and senior managers have called on his services – indeed one of the first times he donned the wig and gown on a fire service case was for London Fire Brigade against an employee with a personal injury claim. LFB lost, but despite some initial professional disappointment, Martin might well have not been too upset in the long run.

For the lion's share of his work is for frontline uniformed staff. He represents them as an advocate before the courts, including the higher ones, and it is a job he relishes. As well as dozens of personal injury cases, he has fought on some of the most high-profile legal campaigns the FBU has run in recent times, including the long-running case for equal treatment for retained firefighters on pensions and sick pay that went all the way to the House of Lords.

When *Firefighter* met Martin, an Employment Tribunal hearing in the retained pensions case was imminent. "Although we are not at the end of the process," says Martin, "retained firefighters have already gained access to the New Firefighters Pensions Scheme and we are hopeful that if they can be seen legally as carrying out broadly similar work, it will enable equal





treatment across the board. This has important implications, not only on pensions but on issues like training where retained firefighters have up to now been shortchanged."

While the retained pensions case has wide significance, for Martin the most difficult jobs he has done recently were representing families of the deceased in inquests into the Harrow Court and Bethnal Green fires, which had resulted in the tragic deaths of four firefighters and one member of the public.

In October the High Court of Justice agreed damages and full liability in relation to firefighter Bill Faust who was killed in the Bethnal Green fire. "Only now can Michelle Faust and her family start rebuilding their lives," says Martin.

"It was absolutely traumatic for the families of the bereaved. Yet Bethnal Green also gave a clear message to everybody involved. The jury was sympathetic with the families of the deceased who had rightly felt let down by the inadequate training and equipment provided to firefighters."

"The narrative verdict in Harrow Court, instead, was very upsetting to the families of Mike Miller, Jeff Wornham and Nathalie Close. The message the jury sent was that the bereaved and the Union were too critical of the senior management and the fire authority had done all it could."

For himself, the Union and the families he represented, the "whole inquest process has been a disappointment". Martin says that "something has to be done" and has some suggestions.

First, he says: "There should be an early acceptance of the need for a full investigation and that acceptance shouldn't be fudged. That was the case in the Bethnal Green inquest but it was only belatedly done for Harrow Court. If all parties know a full investigation is going to be carried out then it makes it much easier to conduct proceedings."

Second, says Martin, there should be a much more focussed use of Rule 43. This is a report addressed by a coroner to the relevant authorities, principally the secretary of state, if they believe that action can be taken to prevent the recurrence of a similar death.

"In both inquests it was promised and then seriously delayed," says Martin, "for over a year in the case of Bethnal Green."

"Such delays go a long way to destroying the purpose of Rule 43. For by then the fire authority and the FBU had produced their health and safety reports – signifying, importantly that the fire authority had already responded to the issues raised in the inquest, so there is no application of a further brain – the coroner's – to the process. The inquest's lessons came too late."

"In the Harrow Court case, Rule 43 acted like a recycle bin on your computer. When anything difficult or contentious came up, it was decided that that should be put in the Rule 43 report."

"This limited the scope of the inquest and the ques-

tions asked. I was allowed to ask what I wanted eventually. It is all to do with attitude and atmosphere. It was almost as if we were trespassing on the patience of the coroner and the jury and wasting their time, when, for example, we suggested that firefighters in some cases were not adequately prepared or trained as firefighters in high rise blocks."

Third, says Martin, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) ought to decide if it wants to prosecute anybody before the coroner's inquest begins, not wait for the inquest to inform its decision to prosecute.

"There are firefighters who, as witnesses, want to tell the full story to an inquest as they are concerned to make sure similar tragedies don't happen again. But they need to be protected from possible self-incrimination. The HSE's part in the inquest is not very substantial and yet it puts dampeners on the whole process. The HSE robs the inquest of a potential role."

Despite this, there are positives that have come out of these inquests for Martin and the wider fire service community.

"In both inquests what came out very strongly was the enormous courage and selflessness of the deceased and those who struggled to rescue them. The rescue attempts on the fireground were relentless and heroic – demonstrating all that's best about the tradition of firefighters to save fallen colleagues."

"As a whole the service cannot fail to learn the lessons of these tragedies and there is now a much healthier attitude to training. I would question whether anybody in a senior position of the fire authority would treat procedures to tackle high-rise fires with anything other than the utmost priority and ensure firefighters are properly trained in them."

"And woe betide those fire authorities that don't," warns Martin.

'Firefighters as witnesses want to tell the full story to an inquest to make sure similar tragedies don't happen again. But they need to be protected from self-incrimination'



PICTURES: STEFANO CAGNONI

Festive feasting

Few of us will resist the temptations that come with Christmas but ...

INDIGESTION

Christmas is a-coming and few of us will be able to resist the temptations that come with this traditional festivity. With the excess, though, often come the less feel-good factors – indigestion being one of the more common ones.

Is indigestion ever serious? The comforting answer is – rarely. People consume as much as twice their usual intake of food and calories on Christmas Day. So it is not surprising that many of us end up feeling bloated and suffering with indigestion. The sheer amount of food and drink tests the system and, on top of this, the bowels' bacteria contribute, adding their own gaseous effects. Fortunately it is rare that any serious harm is done.

What is it?

Indigestion is such a common complaint that nearly everyone experiences it from time to time. Quite simply, it can be explained as unpleasant or even painful sensations in the top of the abdomen or perhaps in the lower part of the chest, which usually come on after eating or drinking. You may feel very full and bloated. You may even experience nausea or vomiting.

Most of the time indigestion is irritating or even a nuisance – rather than a danger. Even after medical investigations, most people with indigestion don't turn out to have anything serious.

What causes it?

Over-eating, rushed meals and a lot of spicy and fatty food can cause indigestion, but

KEY HELP POINTS:

- change your diet: avoid spicy and fatty foods, large meals and eat more slowly
- avoid taking drugs likely to cause stomach irritation
- keep a healthy lifestyle – exercise, lose excess weight and cut down on smoking and alcohol

some people are more prone to underlying conditions such as peptic ulcer disease.

While gastric and duodenal ulcers used to be a regular cause of indigestion only a few years ago, they occur less frequently now. This is because most ulcers are caused by an infection – *helicobacter pylori* – and this bacterium (stomach bug) can be easily detected and treated. Ulcers are more common in people who smoke and those who take anti-inflammatory drugs for joint and muscle pains.

“Reflux” is a more common cause of indigestion. It is caused by stomach acid squirting back into the gullet where it causes irritation. The most common symptom is heartburn – a burning sensation rising up the chest that may be accompanied by an acidic taste in the mouth. Reflux often occurs in people who are overweight, in smokers and after drinking alcohol or big meals containing a lot of fat. People who feel under stress often experience indigestion. But for many people there is no obvious reason why such symptoms occur – they just do.

Only occasionally do people with indigestion go on to develop complications from their condition. Far more rarely, indigestion symptoms can be due to

gallstones, disease of the pancreas or cancer in the stomach or oesophagus.

What is the best treatment?

Most people are able to take care of their symptoms by purchasing over-the-counter remedies from the pharmacist that reduce the amount of acid that is made in your stomach. A wide variety of medicines is available and, if necessary, your GP can advise on the most appropriate for you.

Should I see my doctor?

It is worth seeking medical attention if your indigestion persists or if you start getting these symptoms in middle age or later. If you are feeling generally unwell, losing weight or have any other reason to think there is a problem, then of course you should arrange to see your doctor.

Any signs of possible internal bleeding (black, tar-like motions or vomiting dark brown material) mean that you should seek medical advice without delay. Your GP can help by listening to your symptoms and examining you. Reassurance that there is no serious underlying cause can help greatly.

Will I need tests?

Over the past ten years, guidance to doctors on how best to investigate patients with indigestion has come a long way. Many individuals will be advised in the first instance to have some treatment either to reduce the amount of acid that the stomach makes, or perhaps to clear *helicobacter pylori*. Nowadays it is less often necessary to carry out an endoscopy – swallowing a flexible tube to examine you internally – but if this is needed, it is quick and simple.

What research is needed?

Medical research has enabled many of the important questions about ulcer disease to be answered. However, we have much to learn about *helicobacter pylori* and why it causes problems for some, but not all. But indigestion is one of the commonest reasons for people to visit a GP. We must find out why it is so common – prevention is much better than cure.

→ Core is the only charity in the UK which works to prevent, cure or treat gut and liver diseases by funding high quality medical research. For more info, including on how you can support Core: www.corecharity.org.uk or email info@corecharity.org.uk



People consume as much as twice their usual intake of food and calories on Christmas Day

FOODFOTO/ALAMY

Unity is strength

I am an out of trade member and feel obliged to write and tell you what a help the Union has been to me over the last six years. Following my discharge from the brigade in May 2000, Thompsons solicitors looked into the circumstances of my case and determined that I might have a claim to compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. Karin Lynn of Thompsons submitted a claim that, over the course of six years, was twice rejected on technicalities.

Undeterred, she pursued the claim through the appeals procedure and with the aid of a barrister finally got the CICA to approve my claim and make me an award of £53,598.

Without the unity and help of the FBU who funded Thompsons and the diligence and determination of Karin Lynn, I know I would have received nothing. I would therefore like to thank all the members of the FBU through Firefighter and hope this tale serves to reaffirm the principle that 'unity is strength'.

Bill Haines, East Sussex

Our union is strong

It is important in these changing times that we support our Union. Cutbacks now come in the guise of "modernisation". Once there was little distance between senior staff and operational firefighters. The opposite is true today.

After nearly 23 years as an operational full-time firefighter, I retired on ill-health due to a back injury caused by the brigade and requiring surgery.

Though help was given by the brigade during my lengthy sick period to ascertain the seriousness of my injury, it would not have been forthcoming but for the relentless hard work by my union official.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

opportunity to thank Tam McFarlane, FBU South West, for his relentless hard work and the care he showed me and my family during this difficult time. Also a thank you to the very professional Richard Grayson of Thompsons Solicitors Bristol who made sure justice was done.

Alan Morris, Somerset

Helpful and supportive

Throughout my case Thompsons provided a very helpful, supportive and professional service and, even though the case was not a large one, they never failed in their patience and thoroughness whether via letter or conversation. This attitude not only helped me secure a higher payout for damages, but served to confirm an excellent choice in continuing to use them as solicitors for members.

Nicholas John Fry, Dorset

Legal Eagles

The Union and its solicitors, Thompsons, provide action as well as answers when legal problems loom ... as these members can testify

Once I had retired the brigade did all it could to fight the case for compensation for injury at work. It took over four years of excellent work from the Union and Thompsons solicitors to achieve justice.

My case was due to be heard over a two-day period. By midday of the first day the brigade's legal team had agreed to pay all legal costs and the compensation due. This period of more than four years of my life were traumatic for myself

and my wife. Without the superb support of the Union I do not know what I would have done.

Support your Union. It is strong and there for you.

Without your support, the Union will be unable to achieve all it wants on your behalf. Without your Union, you are vulnerable. Together you are strong and your job will remain in the best traditions as fought for in the past, in the present and will be in the future.

I would like to take this

Successful appeal

After my early retirement due to an 'on duty' accident at work, the North Wales Fire Service decided I did not have a "qualifying injury".

Using the internal disputes resolution procedure, the decision was eventually overturned.

I would like to thank the FBU for this successful appeal against the service and, in particular, express my gratitude and thanks for his expert help to brigade secretary John Purser and also my work colleagues.

Alan Thomas, North Wales

→ Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

‘Bats and pads were going to waste – we got them to Sri Lanka’

Like many in the UK, Nick Pepper was moved by the suffering of people affected by the South Asian tsunami. A keen cricketer himself, he also knew Sri Lankan youngsters were desperate to play cricket but were often short of kit and equipment needed for a sport which is close to a national obsession ...

Nick Pepper, secretary of the Ebbw Vale cricket club, is obviously a bloke who gets things done. Like many in the UK, he was moved by the suffering of people affected by the South Asian tsunami. He also knew firsthand just how keen Sri Lankans are on cricket – he played there himself during his time in the Navy, before taking up firefighting. Even then, he recalls, Sri Lankan youngsters were keen to play cricket but were often short of kit and equipment needed for a sport which is close to a national obsession. He also knew there was a lot of spare kit lying around discarded at Ebbw Vale Cricket Club – where he coaches youngsters on Friday nights. So when he heard that others in the worldwide cricketing fraternity were collecting kit to help restore life in the parts of Sri Lanka ravaged by the tsunami, he set about collecting as much as he could – and finding ways to get it to the other side of the world. Nick recalls how the idea came to him, when he

took stock of discarded cricketing kit and equipment languishing unused in cupboards at the club. “There were pads, bats, kit, all sorts of equipment that could be well used by youngsters keen to play. Lots of it was barely used, and nearly new, but maybe didn’t have the right brand name on it, or had been bought a few seasons ago. It was just going to waste. So the obvious thing was to collect it up and get it over to Sri Lanka. It seemed like a good idea to help.”

New regional sports centre

The Tsunami wreaked devastation in the Galle region of Sri Lanka, on the island’s south coast: Sri Lankan test cricketers were among the many to lose their homes. The Foundation Of Goodness charity has been working to rebuild the area – providing a new regional sports centre in the village of Seenigama, alongside new homes and employment opportunities for people in the area.

Nick, a firefighter for nearly 20 years, learned that other cricket clubs were helping the Foundation Of Goodness fulfil its mission – led by Cricket New South Wales and the Surrey County Cricket Club. This was the impetus he needed to turn compassion for those whose lives had been turned upside down into doing something to help. “There are so many underprivileged children keen to play the sport that more kit and equipment is needed to help meet demand,” says Nick, who, as well as spreading the word in Ebbw Vale that he was on the look out for unwanted kit, set about searching the internet to find the cheapest deal he could to get it out to Sri Lanka.

The project snowballed and donations from local schools and senior players in the club helped build the collection of much-needed cricketing kit – a lot of it “as good as new,” says Nick. “Some was stored in an unused cupboard at the fire station – and friends and colleagues



Nick Pepper coaching youngsters at the indoor cricket school at Eugene Cross Park, Ebbw Vale





The Seenigama village team in action

helped Nick box it all up. Seven “really large boxes” eventually left Nick’s house bound for Sri Lanka.

“I sent over 120 kilos of equipment which would have cost quite a substantial amount of money to ship out. But thanks to Emirate Airlines and their cargo department, I was able to transport the equipment over to Colombo for just over £200.

Thanks to all those who helped

“I’d like to thank all those people who donated equipment, Emirates Airlines for the kind gesture in carrying the equipment so cheaply and Ebbw Vale Cricket Club for loaning the money to pay for the freight.”

This was later recouped in grants from the local authority. The youngsters at Ebbw Vale cricket club know the unused kit has gone to a good home – and that their cricket-hungry counterparts in Sri Lanka are happy to

get their hands on kit which today’s brand-obsessed teens may think of as a little too last season.

Sri Lankan cricketers now playing for English clubs have helped raise funds for cricketing in the Galle region – Middlesex’s fast bowler Chaminda Vaas, and Muttiah Muralitharan who plays for Lancashire. Nick met up with Chaminda Vaas a month or so ago when his team was playing Glamorgan at the Ebbw Vale ground.

Nick keeps in contact with Kushil Gunasekara, from the Foundation Of Goodness charity, who is bowled over by the generosity of the people of Blaenau Gwent. And Nick is collecting more kit for Sri Lankan youngsters. So, if anyone has any unwanted cricket equipment or clothing, any condition or size, e-mail the club through the website www.ebbwvalecricket.co.uk, where more pictures of Sri Lankan youngsters with kit supplied thanks to the efforts of a cricket-loving firefighter from Ebbw Vale can be seen.

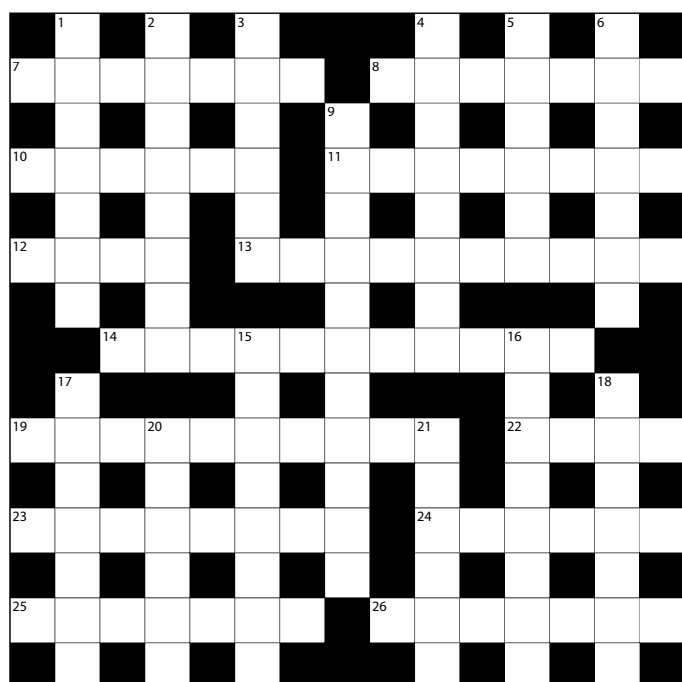
NICK PEPPER

Keen cricketer Nick Pepper, white watch manager at Ebbw Vale Fire Station, has been pulling out all the stops to help young Sri Lankan cricket fans enjoy their favourite sport in a region devastated by the Boxing Day tsunami nearly three years ago.



The kit in its new home

Quick Crossword

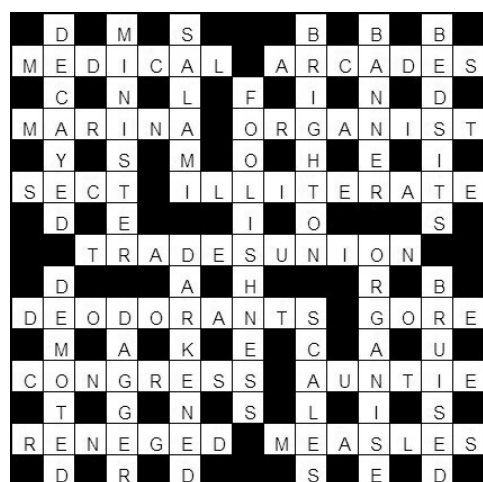


ACROSS

- 7 Seasonal chocolate confection (4,3)
- 8 Clap (7)
- 10 Men, commonly (6)
- 11 Story teller (8)
- 12 Snatch, get hold of (4)
- 13 Where work is long, hard and badly rewarded (10)
- 14 Seasonal fare, originally in US (5,6)
- 19 Emergency medical support staff (10)
- 22 More traditional British alternative to 14? (4)
- 23 Seasonal favourite – served with cream or brandy butter? (5,3)
- 24 Seats (6)
- 25 Carried on demonstrations (7)
- 26 Under (7)

DOWN

- 1 Knives, forks etc (7)
- 2 Peeping game played with small child (8)
- 3 Equine creatures (6)
- 4 One who controls machinery (or telephones?) (8)
- 5 Whiten, by sunlight or chemical compound (6)
- 6 Santa's red-nosed helper (7)
- 9 One who amuses, with song, dance etc (11)
- 15 Beams supporting railway track (8)
- 16 Hugged (8)
- 17 Principal city (7)
- 18 Some folk put them down their trousers! (7)
- 20 Climb; go up (6)
- 21 Small packet (6)



Solution
to October
crossword



Prize Quiz

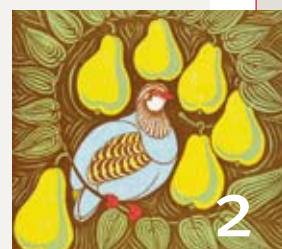
Win a Christmas hamper

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours.
This issue the theme is Christmas.



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

- 1 Name the actor who stars in the 2003 film Bad Santa, former husband of Angelina Jolie.
- 2 What did 'my true love send to me' on the first day of Christmas?
- 3 In which country does Bethlehem lie?
- 4 How many days are there on an Advent Calendar?



2



SHIH FA KAO/AP/PA PHOTOS

5

HOW TO ENTER

To win the Christmas Hamper please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 14 December on a postcard to: Prize Competition (November/December 2007), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

Answers to
October Quiz
1. Mona Lisa
2. Vincent Van Gogh
3. Andy Warhol
4. Pablo Picasso
5. JMW Turner
6. Michelangelo

Winner of August/
September quiz was
Sally Neal of Kent

StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

FireBuy



A few problems have come the way of FireBuy, the new national procurement arm of the fire service. Up to the end of June 2007 it had already spent £2,158,093 since it was formally set up in April 2006, only 15 months earlier.

The breakdown, provided in a Parliamentary answer, is (a) £1,099,877 for salaries for full-time staff, (b) £11,092 on expenses for the non-executive chair and board of directors and (c) £1,047,124 for the integrated clothing project, including salary costs associated with the project.

So much for the costs. But what of the savings? DCLOG is reluctant to supply figures to Parliament for which initiatives have actually saved money and how much. **Savings may be hampered by a row involving the integrated clothing project that now involves m'learned and expensive friends with the wigs.**

FireBuy's Chief Executive Officer Terry Brewer issued a "Dear Chief Officer" letter which has been passed through the catflap. In it he says a legal claim has been filed by Lion Apparel Systems in relation to the integrated clothing project that aims to deliver new personal protective equipment, station wear and other "clothing options".

Mr Brewer warns that unless the claim is brought to a swift conclusion it "may result in some delay" to the rollout of the new kit. This is serious stuff because fire authorities are being given the choice either of using FireBuy or of being tied up in heavy-duty red tape if they want to use other suppliers.

Lost Cat



Greater Manchester have lost their "Cat". Yes, Katrina Davis, their head of media has announced she is leaving.

No one can tell me why she is leaving. She was highly thought of by her peers in the world of media.

Cat had just delivered GMC a great spot on national television, Inferno 999, a six-part documentary, complete with London's Burning-style nicknames. The work of the service was positively reported.

It's the way of the world that the "other" side of the fire service – decisions and

comments of management – can't be kept away from the big bad media beast. These included the production of a four-page guide on how to use the new reclining chairs.

This was swiftly followed by disciplinary action against three firefighters for not using the chairs as set out in the regulations. So GMC has lost its head of media.

But, for some reason it has sprung – Hydra-like – three heads of human resources. There is now an upper head director of human resources, plus two other heads of human resources.

Any ideas as to what we call this three-headed HR to: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

Cat A calls



In 2004 the Government abolished national standards that set out response times for attending fires.

The reason it gave – nonsense of course – was that such national standards have no place in a modern fire service.

A senior officer has pointed out that there is one national standard the Government, numerous chief officers and some fire authorities are determined the fire service must hit. Sadly it concerns co-responding and the national standard for the attendance of the ambulance service – attending Category A medical emergencies within eight minutes, remarkably similar to the old "A risk" fire service national standard.

We're in the daft position that the only national standard our rulers want the fire service to hit is a standard set out for another public service for which the fire service has no statutory duty. One national standard is critical to the fire service, one isn't, but which one do you think they go for?

Devon scream



Devon and Somerset fire authority is still keen to find cuts. The newly merged authority points to a £1 million funding shortfall.

They are slow to highlight that the local "co-responding" scheme costs the authority nearly £500,000 a year, half the claimed shortfall. And the local ambulance service has no intention of paying this money back, or anything like it.

It is a direct example of how funding "co-responding" – subsidising the ambulance service – has led to pressure to make cuts to frontline fire services the authority has a statutory duty to provide. I am told Devon is not alone with this problem. So **next time chiefie wants to cut frontline fire services, check the books to see how much "co-responding" is costing.**

✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk



25-year badges



John Kiely (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



Tony Dixon (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



Paul Clark (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



Glen Blah (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



Kevin Leftley (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



John Bradbury (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



David Manthorpe (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



Alan Grubb (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



John Gray (l) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



Paul Kidd (r) receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 London Officers' Secretary



John Garmston, [l] Red Watch, Station 2, Wokingham Road, Reading, receives his 25-year badge from Southern Regional Treasurer Dave Dymond

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS